

KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

STAFF NOTE

Review Item:

Review of Kentucky's Writing Assessment

Applicable Statute or Regulation:

KRS 158.645, KRS 158.6453, KRS 158.6458, KRS 158.770, KRS 158.775
703 KAR 5:010 and 703 KAR 5:080

History/Background:

Existing Policy. KRS 158.6453 sets forth the statutory requirements for the design and components of Kentucky's Commonwealth Accountability Testing System (CATS). Under this statute, the assessment program is to include an on-demand assessment of writing and writing portfolios consisting of samples of student work. Under KRS 158.6455 the Kentucky Board of Education is to determine how the assessment program is used for accountability purposes. As the Kentucky Board of Education (KBE) defines the direction and technical specifications for the next request for proposals for the Commonwealth Accountability Testing System, KBE will need to define how Kentucky will assess writing and how writing will be included in the accountability system.

Kentucky currently assesses writing for school accountability through a portfolio process that includes samples of student work and an on-demand writing assessment where students respond to a writing prompt during the testing window for the Kentucky Core Content Test. Currently, the writing portfolio constitutes 11.4% of the school's accountability score; the on-demand assessment makes up 2.85% of the school's accountability. In addition, KRS 158.6458 requires an annual audit of the writing portfolios. The current assessment was designed to assess Kentucky's capacities, goals and expectations for writing and to reflect best practices of teaching writing.

Over the past year at previous Kentucky Board of Education (KBE) meetings, KBE has focused continued discussions on the assessment of writing and on specific issues related to the instructional time spent on portfolios, portfolio connections to P-16 transition and resolving differences in teacher-produced scores and audited scores. As a result of these discussions the Board directed staff to examine ten areas of the writing process. The ten areas identified were:

- How much the writing assessment components count for accountability purposes
- Quality of training and the audiences that are reached by that training
- Alignment and updating of performance standards
- Standardizing the scoring procedure used by schools
- Using teachers in the audit process

- Exploring alternative sets of content at various grade levels
- Spreading entries across grade levels or changing grade levels
- Improving the code of ethics
- Finding ways to decrease emphasis on the score and increase emphasis on improving the writing process
- Appropriate uses of technology

The Board requested that the Department form a Writing Focus Group to review the issues related to the writing assessment and to recommend a writing assessment format for the upcoming Commonwealth Accountability Testing System's Request for Proposals. To address these issues and draft recommendations for the KBE to consider, the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) convened a Writing Focus Group composed of Kentucky teachers, instructional supervisors, district assessment coordinators, principals, faculty from institutions of higher education including the community colleges, curriculum supervisors, school-based writing consultants, a library media specialist, and the president of the state PTA.

The Writing Focus Group met July 28-29, August 26-27 and October 20 to review writing assessment issues and draft recommendations to present to the Kentucky Board of Education. The KBE previously received a briefing on the Writing Focus Group's discussions at the August, September and October 2004 KBE meetings. The Board also has received a briefing paper, a research summary, a summary of eight options for assessing writing and a summary of feedback on writing issues. As a result of the October meeting, the Board provided further guidance for the Writing Focus Group and KDE staff.

At the October 6-7 state board meeting, the Board considered eight different options for possible configuration of the writing assessment from the Writing Focus Group. From their deliberations, some of the points of consensus that were reached to help the Writing Focus Group narrow the scope of their work and finalize its recommendations are as follows:

- Maintain a writing portfolio/collection of writing over time, on-demand writing assessment and multiple-choice assessment for both assessment and accountability purposes.
- Account for writing at more grade levels to decrease the perception that writing is only important in the assessed years and increase writing instruction to students in all grades.
- Retain a writing portfolio for both assessment and accountability, if improvements are implemented.
- Provide more opportunities for analytical writing at the high school level and possibly as a choice at the middle school level.
- Assess grammar and mechanics in a visible manner as part of the test.
- Include students responding to text as part of the on-demand writing component.
- Maintain the current overall weight for writing but consider decreasing the weight of portfolios and increasing the weight of on-demand writing.

- Move on-demand writing out of the assessment window or place it at the beginning of the assessment window.
- Continue to explore a combination of regional scoring and school-based scoring by Kentucky teachers.
- Explore models for both holistic scoring and analytical scoring.
- Consider models that provide teachers and students with instructional feedback and diagnostic information.
- Expand the audit process to include instructional implications and consequences for teachers.
- Maintain a working folder in primary with pieces analyzed and assessed at the classroom level for instructional purposes and student accountability.
- Strengthen the Code of Ethics to target inappropriate practices.
- Develop a comprehensive and systemic approach for professional development for teachers and instructional leaders. Focus on writing instructional partnerships.

The Board requested that the feedback from the Writing Focus Group's October 20 meeting include data on 3 to 5 major decisions that the KBE needs to make. It was requested that the information include a rationale for change and the impact of the change. (See Attachment A for October 20 feedback from the Writing Focus Group.)

The overarching question for consideration is:

Which design elements serve instructional purposes best and support a continuous instructional process?

Also included to assist the KBE in advising staff on making improvements in the writing assessment are the following attachments:

Attachment B: Current 2004-05 Assessment Configuration and Current Program of Studies Requirements in Writing

Attachment C: 2007 Assessment, Sample Configuration #1

Attachment D: 2007 Assessment, Sample Configuration #2

Attachment E: 2007 Assessment, Sample Configuration #3

Attachment F: Current Portfolio Configurations By Level and Examples of Possible Revised Configurations

Policy Issue(s):

- What is the Board's further advice to staff regarding the design of the writing assessment?
- What is the Board's advice on the accountability years for writing and which components of the writing assessment should be assessed at each of the accountability years?
- What additional questions does the Board have for NTAPAA?

Impact on Getting to Proficiency:

Writing instruction and program implementation must improve in all schools if students are to become proficient writers. Proficiency in other content areas also involves the

student's ability to present an understanding and application of content knowledge. Although open response questions are not scored according to writing criteria, a student who has the ability to formulate a written argument or explanation has a greater opportunity to receive high scores in all content areas.

Evidence indicates that Kentucky's model of writing assessment will guide writing instruction in the classrooms across the state. Therefore, the work of this focus group will be essential in helping all schools reach proficiency.

Groups Consulted and Brief Summary of Responses:

- National Technical Advisory Panel on Assessment and Accountability (NTAPAA) – See handout titled "Notes from Conference Call with John Poggio, NTAPAA Member, October 11, 2004"
- Kentucky Association for Assessment Coordinators (KAAC)- KAAC is recommending that portfolios be removed from accountability. They further recommend that writing be assessed through an on-demand process at expanded grade levels. This recommendation would include increased options for student subject choice as well as an analytical scoring process that might provide comparable sub-content reports and scale scores similar to what we have for other content areas today.

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